DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 958 CS 511 876

AUTHOR	Godinho, Sally; Shrimpton, Bradley
TITLE	Exploring Differences in Students' Engagement in Literature Discussions.
PUB DATE	2002-12-00
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education (Brisbane, Australia, December 1-5, 2002).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.aare.edu.au/02pap/god02471.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Classroom Communication; Data Analysis; *Educational Practices; Educational Research; Elementary Education; *Literature Appreciation; *Sex Differences; Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS	Australia (Melbourne); Research in Progress; *Small Group Communication; *Student Engagement; University of Melbourne (Australia)

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses research in progress which is examining differences in the ways that boys and girls engage in small-group literature discussions, and the enabling strategies teachers use to support student talk. The paper uses case studies which draw on videotaped data from small-group literature discussions, interviews with teachers, and student focus groups to provide insights into teacher practice in small-group discussions. It states that the research project was conducted in three schools located in the Melbourne suburbs--approximately 120 children participated, and 12 teachers were recruited from the three primary levels: lower primary (Prep-Year 2); middle primary (Years 3-4); and upper primary (Years 5-6). The paper finds that what is emerging as more significant than gender-based differences in the ways that boys and girls engage in literature discussions is their socio-cultural positioning to the discussion process. It notes that it is planned that in 2003 the CD-ROM produced from the rich data collected in the project will be used as a learning and teaching resource in two undergraduate subjects in the Bachelor of Teaching program, and will also be made available for inservice professional development. (Contains 22 references and 3 figures.) (Author/NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

http://www.aare.edu.au/02pap/god02471.htm

ED 473 958

Exploring Differences in Students' Engagement in Literature Discussions

Sally Godinho and Bradley Shrimpton (The University of Melbourne)

Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Brisbane 2-5, December 2002

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Godinho

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 511 876

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

http://www.aare.edu.au/02pap/god02471.htm

Exploring Differences in Students' Engagement in Literature Discussions

Sally Godinho and Bradley Shrimpton (The University of Melbourne)

This paper is a work in progress, examining differences in the ways that boys and girls engage in small-group literature discussions, and the enabling strategies teachers use to support student talk. Case studies draw on videotaped data from small-group literature discussions, interviews with teachers, and student focus groups to provide insights into teacher practice in small-group discussions.

Introduction

An *Early Career Research Grant* from the University of Melbourne has provided us with the opportunity to examine gender differences in the ways that boys and girls engage in the process discussion. Current research suggests that girls are generally considered better at collaborative small-group talk where interpersonal skills are valued (Jenkins & Cheshire 1990; Reay 1991; Sadker & Sadker (1994). According to Jenkins & Cheshire, girls are "careful listeners and cooperative members of their discussion groups" (1990, p. 261). However, studies in the 1980s found that girls occupy less linguistic space in discussions (Spender 1982; French & French, 1984). Like Davies (1989), Spender's research showed that school age children "bring to the classroom the understanding that it is males who should have the floor and females who should be the dutiful listeners" (1980. p. 149). Such research has informed the key aims for this project which are:

- to examine differences in talk patterns used by boys and girls in small-group discussions and their level of engagement in the discussion process; and
- to identify the supportive talk patterns used by primary teachers in small-group literature discussions.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Design of the Study

School Settings

The three schools participating in the study are located in the suburbs of Melbourne. A cross-section of co-educational schools was used, covering a range of student socio-economic backgrounds and representative of the three major school categories: government, Catholic and independent schools.

Teacher participants

Twelve teachers were recruited from the three primary levels: lower primary (Prep-Year 2); middle primary (Years 3-4); and upper primary (Years 5-6).

Student participants

Approximately 120 children participated in the project. Teachers selected children for the literature discussion groups: three boys and three girls. Grouping of children was heterogeneous, and the cultural diversity of the group was largely reflective of the school population.

Literature discussions

Teachers were asked to choose a text they would typically use for a small-group literature discussion, considering literature in its broadest terms of definition. Some teachers chose factual texts, others chose fiction and some chose visual texts such as posters.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected from the school sites between February and June, 2002. The instruments used included small-group literature discussions of 10-30 minutes duration; 15 minute interviews with the teachers facilitating the literature discussions; and ten minute focus group interviews with the student-participants. All discussions and interviews were video recorded using semi-professional digital audio and video equipment suitable for data collection and CD ROM development.

The decision to produce a quality digital video recording of the small-group discussions, focus groups and interviews was made in order to serve a number of purposes. As a data collection technique, the use of video ensured a highly accurate documentation of both the discourse patterns and subtle non-verbal interactions within the literature discussions. The capturing of quality digital video and audio provided a unique opportunity to share the research data and findings as part of a CD ROM that could be incorporated in pre-service teaching programs at the University of Melbourne (this is discussed in the concluding paragraphs of this paper).

Two cameras were used for the literature discussions and the focus group interviews. This approach enabled an overview of the group interaction, in addition to close-up shots of individual children speaking. Before the taping commenced, children were familiarized with the equipment and the video-recording process. This approach assisted

children in adjusting to the intrusion of additional people and equipment into their discussion space. The literature discussions, interviews and focus groups produced 14 hours of video and audio material of 18 group discussions that was transcribed and subsequently analysed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is still in the early stages. However, strong patterns are already emerging from the analysis of a representative sample of literature discussions, teacher interviews and student focus groups.

Talk-turns taken by boys and girls

Contrary to comments expressed by the teachers in their interviews that talk-turns in the discussions are gender balanced, boys consistently dominated the discussions as Figure 1 cogently reveals. This finding accords with earlier research (Spender 1982; French & French 1984; Sadker & Sadker 1985), claiming that boys dominate the linguistic space.

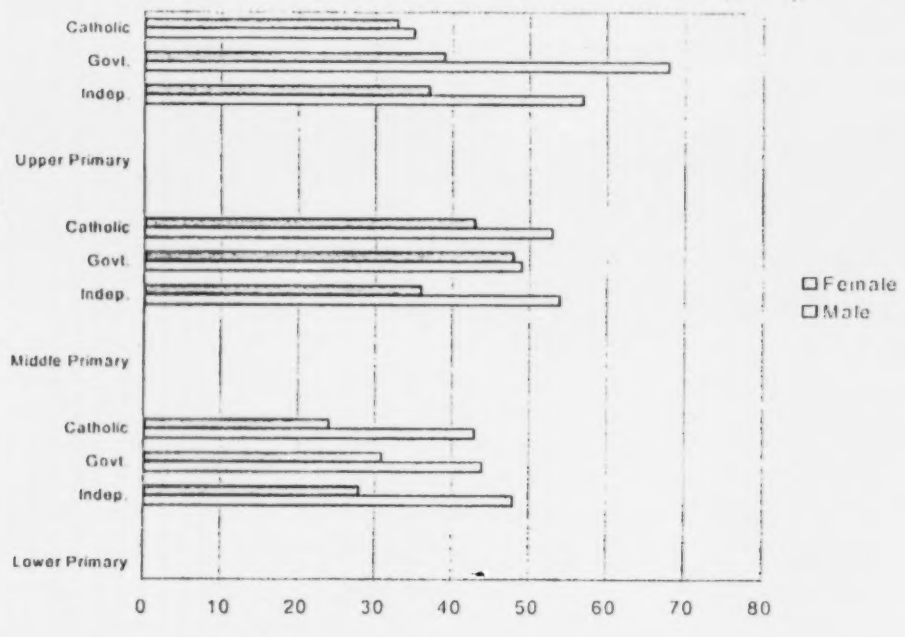

Figure 1 talk-turns taken by boys and girls in the literature discussions

Davies (1989) claims children arrive in preschool acting, speaking and behaving according to conventional images of gender, but she claims gender positioning varies considerably according to culture, social class, ethnicity, age and individual circumstances. Our research shows that in the middle primary level, girls across the three school categories, participate more frequently in discussions, suggesting that school policy emphasis on gender equality is having some impact. Yet, with the exception of the Catholic school, by the upper primary level the boys are again strongly dominating the discussions in the government school and the independent school.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Teacher ownership of the discussion

Figure 2 strongly suggests teachers exert control over the discussion process through their dominance of the talk-turns taken. The graph indicates that the IRE/IRF pattern (teacher initiation of question, student response to the question, teacher evaluation or feedback of the students' response, Sinclair & Coulthard 1975) is entrenched in the majority of literature discussions, thus limiting opportunities for dialogic talk.

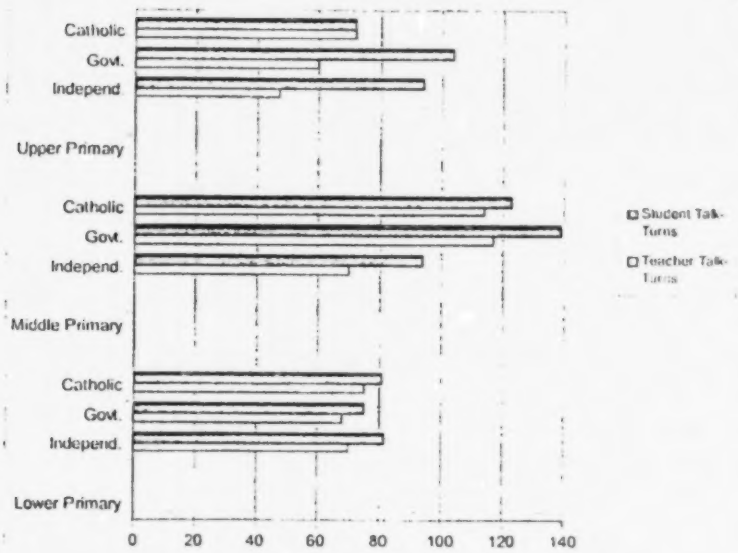

Figure 2 Frequency count of talk-turns taken by teachers and students

There is, however, a significant reduction in the number of teacher talk-turns taken by the upper primary teachers in the independent and government schools, indicating that teachers are increasingly prepared *to vacate the floor* (Perrott 1988) and allow students to control the direction of talk. This is not the case in the Catholic school where student and teacher talk-turns are identically matched. A likely explanation offered by the teachers is that their children do not have the language skills required for in-depth discussion, given their non-English speaking backgrounds. Dansie (2001) notes that teachers of English as Second Language (ESL) focus more on initiating interactions and directing students, being explicit about content and process.

An important factor revealed in the focus group interviews with these children is their lack of awareness of the social and cooperative skills required to participate effectively in the discussion process (Abbott & Godinho 2001). Compared with the children interviewed from the government and independent schools, these children have very little understanding of what constitutes a discussion. This finding accords with a large body of research (Dillon 1990; 1994; Bridges 1988; Edwards and Westgate 1994; Godinho 2001) and explains why at the upper primary level there is no evidence of student dialogue occurring in the Catholic school.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Strategies that Support Talk

The following case snapshots highlight how student needs and teacher purposes shape the discussion process. Figure 3 summarises Luke and Freebody's (1995) *Four Resources Model*, which is used to highlight the literacy focus the selected teachers apply to their literature discussions.

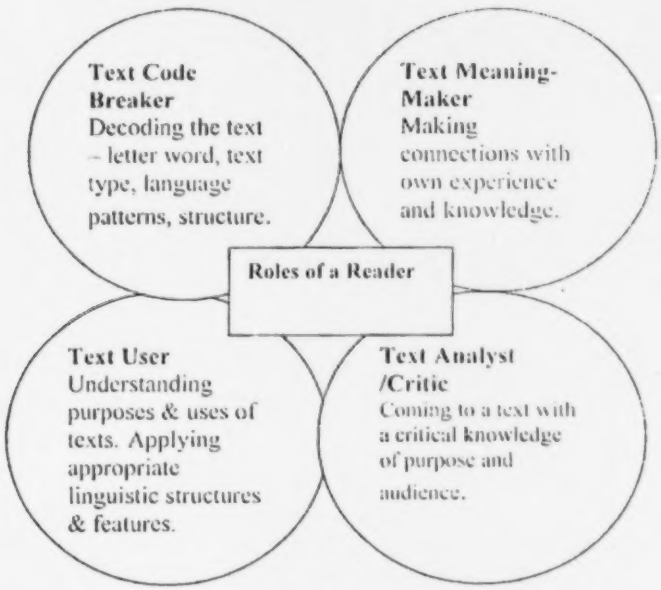
Text Code Breaker
Decoding the text – letter word, text type, language patterns, structure.
Text Meaning-Maker
Making connections with own experience and knowledge.
Roles of a Reader
Text User
Understanding purposes & uses of texts. Applying appropriate linguistic structures & features.
Text Analyst /Critic
Coming to a text with a critical knowledge of purpose and audience.

Figure 3 Adaptation of Luke and Freebody's (1998) *Four Resources Model*

Case Study 1: Rose, Year5/6, government school

Rose also works from both a text meaning-maker and a text analyst/critic perspective. Her students are able to articulate clearly what a small-group literature discussion involves, and are aware that people can create different meanings from a text, as evidenced below:

> F When we are all having different points of
>
> view, but we are all discussing it.
>
> M We're not going against each other, we're . . .
>
> M Working with each other to get further in, to
>
> get more points. (focus group, p.1)

Rose encourages interactive student dialogue and higher-order thinking. She uses explicit strategies to enhance the discussion process such as: developing student awareness of what constitutes discussion; setting student expectations at the outset; and using students' questions to focus discussion:

> M I wonder why Japan entered the war?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

M Because they had such a big army that they like thought let's just go. They were trying to conquer everything because they had such a big army, but when the war ended - um - most of them died.

T Do you know how the war ended?

M Yes, when the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and they had lots of casualties.

T Has anybody else go a wonder why question?

F I wonder why they didn't transport the elephants to another country?

M Because they mightn't have had the transport at that particular stage.

F Yeah, they might have only had boats. (literature discussion, p. 6)

Despite the strong multi-cultural presence in this group of children, all have advanced language skills and are confident about expressing their ideas, asking questions and building on each other's responses, thus enabling their to delegate responsibility to the children for directing the discussion as the following excerpt demonstrates.

Case Study 2: Ambrose, Year2, Catholic school

Ambrose is aware that the cultural backgrounds of his students impact on the discussion dynamics. He acknowledges the need to adjust his discussion strategies accordingly, pitching his literacy focus for the children at the text codebreaker level of the *Four Resources Model* (Freebody & Luke, 1998). Ambrose's concern is primarily with building basic comprehension skills. Thus his questioning is directed at the lower-level of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. He asserts:

> I instigate a conversation to a certain extent ... as they do need to have material drawn out of them. . . . I suppose I mentor the conversation. . . . Directed questioning is sometimes better for these quieter children. (interview, p. 1)

The following extract from Ambrose's literature discussion, demonstrates his concern with building children's word knowledge and modelling linguistic structures:

T How could the troll get some money?

M You could stole them.

T Well he could steal it, but we've already said that he's probably not a very nasty troll . . . so I don't think he will steal it. So let's think of another way.

M If the Billy Goats have some money he will say please can I borrow some of your money. . . .

T He could. . . . What does the troll own?

M Grass.

M& F No bridge.

T ... How could he get money out of the Billy Goats?

F If they cross the bridge they have to pay money.

T Excellent. If they cross the bridge they have to pay some money. . . . Who know a word for that? If they cross over the bridge? . . . Rhymes with roll and it starts with 't' . . .

F Toll, toll, toll. (Year 2, literature discussion, p.6-7)

Children's responses are noticeably short, as is frequently the case with ESL children (Dansie, 2001), but the extract reveals the children's eagerness to participate and explore their ideas. As Durrant & Green (2000) argue, "social and educational practices need to be 'meaningful' before they can become 'critical', or be made so" (p.7).

Although the two teachers place different emphases on the Luke and Freebody *Four Resources* Model (1998), they are both mindful of Vygotsky's (1978) three key constructivist principles: cognitive development is both biological and socio-cultural; individuals learn through social interaction and collaboration; and language is central to learning. Moreover, they both value small-group contexts where children have opportunities to learn through sharing their knowledge, and using talk to mediate their learning. Importantly, these teachers are aware of meeting the individual needs of both boys and girls.

What is emerging as more significant than gender-based differences in the ways that boys and girls engage in literature discussions is their socio-cultural positioning to the discussion process. It is evident that some children already possess the *cultural capital* (Bourdieu 1977) that will privilege their schooling experiences by virtue of cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills, including language practices and values that have already been passed on to these students. As Rowan *et al.* (2002) argue, the question that must guide further analysis of the data is "which girls, which boys?" and what actions are teachers taking to ensure both boys and girls have more equal opportunities through quality teaching practices.

Future Directions

With pre-service teaching programs increasingly being subject to disproportionate staff-student ratios and delimited resources, new technologies such as CD ROMs are providing innovative new ways of creating environments where novice teachers can investigate, develop and synthesize their understanding of quality teaching practices (Love & Shrimpton 2002). When the framework and methodology was established for the study of students in small-group literature discussions, it was anticipated the collected video material would not only provide rich data for the proposed study but also a rare window

into authentic teaching practices. This anticipated outcome has been richly rewarded and offers a unique opportunity to create a CD ROM that presents a fly on the wall experience of how teachers go about facilitating successful small-group discussions. It is planned that in 2003 the CD ROM produced from the rich data collected in this project will be used as a learning and teaching resource in two undergraduate subjects in the Bachelor of Teaching program, and will also be made available for in-service professional development.

References

Abbott, C. & Godinho, S. (2001). *Thinking Voices: Developing oral communication* Skills, Curriculum Corporation, Carlton, Vic.

Bloom, B. (ed) (1956-1964). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The classification of educational goals by a committee of university examiners (handbook 1).* Longman Group, London.

Bourdieu, P. 1977, 'Cultural reproduction and social reproduction', in J. Karabel and A Halsey (eds), *Power and Ideology in Education*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Dansie, B. 2001, 'Scaffolding oral language: The hungry caterpillar', in J. Hammond ed), Scaffolding: Teaching and Learning in language and literacy education, Primary English Teachers' Association, Newtown, NSW, pp. 49-67.

Davies, B. 1989, *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool children and gender*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

Dillon, J. 1990, Conducting discussions by alternatives to questioning, in W. Wilen (ed), *Teaching and Learning Through Discussion: The theory, research and practice of the teaching method*, Charles C. Thomas, Illinois, pp. 79-76.

Dillon, J. 1994, *Using Discussions in Classrooms*, Open University Press Buckingham.

Durrant, C. & Green, B. 2000, 'Literacy and the new technologies in school education: Meeting the l(IT) eracy challenge?, *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, Vol. 23, No. 2.

Edwards, A. &Westgate, D. 1994, *Investigating Classroom Talk* (2nd ed), Falmer Press, London.

French, J. & French, P., 1984, 'Gender imbalance in the primary classroom: An interactional account', *Educational Research*, Vol. 26, No. 2.

Godinho, S. 2002, *An examination of teachers' responses to a literature model in selected primary classes*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, Department of Language, Literacy and Arts Education.

Jenkins, N. & Cheshire, J. 1990, 'Gender issues in the GCSE oral English examination: Part 1', *Language and Education*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 261-292.

Kenway, J. (ed) 1995, *Will Boys be Boys? Boys' education in the context of gender reform*, Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Deakin West, ACT.

Luke, A. & Freebody, P. 1998, 'The aim is metacognition: For teachers as well as students', *Literacy Learning: Secondary Thoughts,* Vol. 6. No. 2, June, 1998.

Love, K. Shrimpton, B. 2002, 'Can One Size Fit All? Challenges in the Interative Development and Evaluation of a Multimedia Resource for Pre-service Teachers in a Mass Education Cost Effective Context', paper presented at Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education, New Zealand.

Perrott, C. 1988, *Classroom Talk and Pupil Learning: Guidelines for educators*, Harcourt Bruce Janovich, Sydney.

Reay, D. 1991, 'Intersection of gender, race and class in the primary school', *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* Vol. 12, pp. 163-182.

Rowan, L., Knobel, M., Bigum, C. & Lankshear, C. 2002, *Boys, Literacies and Schooling: The dangerous territories of gender-based literacy reform*, Open University Press, Buckingham, Philadelphia.

Sadker, D. & Sadker, M. 1994, *Failing at Fairness: How America's schools cheat girls*, Touchstone, New York.

Sinclair, J. & Coulthard, R. 1975, *Towards an Analysis of Discourse*, Oxford University Press, London.

Spender, D. 1982, *Invisible Women: The schooling scandal*, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, London.

Vygotsky, L.1978, *Mind and Society: The development of higher psychological Processes*, Harvard University Press Cambridge.

ERIC REC Submissions - Reproduction Release Form

CS 511 876

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
Reproduction Release (Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Exploring Differences in Students' Engagement in Literature Discussions	
Author(s): Sally Gedding and Bradley Shrimpton	
Corporate Source: AARE Website	Publication Date: February, 2003

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents annc in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to tl source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to al 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTE SAMPLE TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
↑ ☑	↑ ☐	↑ ☐
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduc dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees an system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and oth service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: Sally L Gedding	Printed Name/Position/Title: Dr Sally Gedding
Organization/Address: The University of Melbourne	Telephone: (03) 9344 3092 Fax: (03) 9347 2485
	E-mail Address: [illegible] Date: 7/03/03

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, pl provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly mo stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor: NA	
Address:	
Price:	